



health trends



El Paso VA Health Care System

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Treating and Preventing Diabetes at the El Paso VAHCS

Affecting 24 million people in the United States, diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the nation, and can cause serious health complications, including heart disease, blindness, kidney failure and lower-extremity amputations. The disease causes many complications with the heart, kidneys, and vascular system, shortening life expectancy in high risk patients by as much as five to ten years.

As serious as it is, diabetes is highly treatable and preventable. With proper medical care, diet, and exercise, diabetes can be well managed, significantly lowering the risk of complication and improving quality of life.

To help veterans with diabetes and other health problems, the El Paso VA Health Care System has launched an aggressive campaign to manage diabetes.

In addition to regular management by the Primary Care Provider, the El Paso VA offers several special programs. One such program is focused on weight loss, which is a key to

controlling diabetes. Dietitians are available to provide expert advice and guidance on how to lose weight.

A special weight management program, *MOVE!* (Managing Overweight Veterans Everywhere) is also available. *MOVE!* is an evidence-based, patient-centered program with a comprehensive focus on behavior, nutrition and physical activity. *MOVE!* can help you lose weight, keep it off, and improve your health. Veterans interested in participating in this program should ask their primary care provider for a referral to the program.

Veterans with diabetes are also encouraged to join one of our group clinics. Research and studies have found patients can benefit in many ways from participating in group clinics. These clinics allow patients to socialize and encourage each other, as well as share information on problem solving, adherence to medications and



learn new survival, prevention and maintenance skills.

The El Paso VA has the following four group clinics available:

- **Primary Care Diabetes Group:** Contact Rogelio Chacon at (915) 564-7562
- **Move Group Program:** Contact Javier Gomez at (915) 564-7506
- **Introduction to Nutrition and Diabetes Group:** Contact Javier Gomez at (915) 564-7506
- **Diabetes Self Management Classes:** Contact Maribel Gonzalez at (915) 564-7506

El Paso VA encourages all veterans with diabetes to take advantage of these wonderful programs and begin to take control of the disease. ●

Suicide Prevention: Everyone's Business

Suicide Prevention Is Everyone's Business – that's the message the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is sending to veterans, their family members and friends, and the general public, as part of its nationwide campaign to prevent suicides among veterans.

VA has launched a series of activities to increase public awareness of the warning signs of suicide. "Preventing suicide among veterans is a top priority at VA," said Dr. Michael J. Kussman, Under Secretary for Health. "Each and every veteran suicide is a tragedy. We are committed to doing everything we can to prevent these sad events from occurring."

The VA Suicide Prevention Hotline (1-800-273-TALK/8255), which makes trained mental health professionals available to speak with veterans in emotional crisis, or with their family members, is in operation around the clock. More than 33,000 veterans, family members or friends of veterans have called the Hotline since it began operating in July 2007. Of those, more than 1,600 have been considered rescues, and have prevented possible tragedies.

In addition, VA has sponsored two previous Suicide Prevention Awareness events and placed announcements about suicide prevention and the VA Lifeline on VA's web site (www.va.gov). The suicide prevention program

also includes two centers that conduct research and provide support to all locations of care.

VA also is distributing brochures, wallet cards, telephone stickers, bumper magnets, key chains and stress balls to veterans, their families and VA employees to promote awareness of the Hotline number and to educate its employees, the community and veterans about how to identify and help those who may be at risk.

Large posters providing the Hotline number and website are displayed at all medical facilities. They feature the slogan: **"IT TAKES THE COURAGE AND STRENGTH OF A WARRIOR TO ASK FOR HELP."**

All VA medical centers have suicide prevention coordinators. New staff at each facility will bring the number of VA staff dedicated to the suicide prevention effort to more than 400. VA also has hired more than 3,900 new mental health employees since 2005 – bringing the total number of mental health employees to more than 17,000 mental health workers.

VA has also announced that by the end of 2009, the Department will add 61 new Vet Centers (bringing the total number to 268) throughout the nation to provide more individual, group

and family counseling to veterans of all wars.

VA's efforts to identify veterans who may be at risk for suicide have also increased. All new patients at VA centers are screened to determine if they are at risk for suicide.

**IT TAKES THE COURAGE
AND STRENGTH OF A
WARRIOR TO ASK
FOR HELP.
1-800-273-TALK(8255)**

To raise family and community awareness of the warning signs of suicide, VA suggests that if a loved one is exhibiting any of the following behaviors, he or she should seek help immediately:

- Talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Trying to get pills, guns, or other ways to harm oneself
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting in a reckless or risky way
- Feeling trapped, like there is no way out
- Saying or feeling there's no reason for living.

Additional information is available at VA's web site at www.mentalhealth.va.gov. ●

The Patient: An Important Member of the Surgical Team

By Maureen Dicker, RN, MS, CHE
Network 18 Patient Safety Officer

It doesn't matter that you have the best surgeon and are in a highly reputable medical center – your safety depends on you taking an active part in your care. There have been many reports about incorrect surgery being performed, or even surgery on the wrong person. It sounds frightening, but there are ways you can help!

First, don't think your doctor or nurse is being forgetful when they ask you to state your name and what procedure you're having – this helps prevent communication errors. Many close calls have occurred when patients with similar names arrive on the same day for the same procedure. With the fast pace of the admission area combined with pre-surgery jitters, it's easy

to answer to the wrong name. Question anything that doesn't sound right to you – even if it's something like your doctor's name.

If your surgeon confirms which knee is to be operated on and then proceeds to make an X with a marker, don't think it's a question of short-term memory problems. This assures that all the operating team members have the same information.

More than one person will ask you the same questions. There are a series of checkpoints in place to assure your safety. A time-out will be performed by all the team members to make sure everyone is in agreement on the right patient, the right procedure, and which side of the body is involved.

Be sure you understand instructions both prior to and after the surgery. Call the phone number provided on your discharge instructions if you get home and something doesn't seem right. And, as always, have a relative or friend act as your second set of eyes and ears to help understand what to do before and after your surgery.

As health care professionals, we're committed to providing you the best care in a safe manner. We want you to partner with us.

The Joint Commission has published many brochures to help patients get involved in their own care. You can find them on the Internet at www.jointcommission.org/GeneralPublic/Speak+Up/. ●

Reminder: Flu Season Is Here!

Once again, the flu season has arrived, which means it's time to think about how you'll avoid getting sick this fall and winter. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized from the flu each year, and 36,000 die.

The best way to avoid getting the flu is to get a flu

vaccination. VA health care facilities now have the flu vaccine available. For more information, please contact the VA facility in your area.

Reminder: please notify your health care provider if you receive a flu vaccine from another health care provider from outside the VA. ●



Telephone Improvements at El Paso VAHCS

In 2006, veterans from the El Paso VA Health Care System shared their opinions about the telephone system, reporting the telephone system was not providing the level of service they needed. They were sometimes unable to connect with our facility and often experienced long wait times on the telephone. This affected their ability to speak with our staff in order to coordinate their health care needs or to connect with other services.

To address their concerns, the El Paso VA examined all aspects of its current telephone system. A review of the equipment revealed it was outdated and could no longer handle all the incoming calls. This adversely impacted our ability to accept and process calls. It was determined that before any changes could be made, including hiring additional staff,

the current system would need to be replaced. In 2007, the facility received the funding it needed to purchase a new system that could support our facility's growing needs.

By March 2008, our new telephone system was installed and fully operational. This was great news for our staff and veterans. The new system has the capability to handle all incoming calls. It can also collect telephone customer service data. We are now able to determine the number of incoming calls, average duration, peak call times, number of dropped calls, best times to call, and an overall score called Grade of Service (GOS). GOS shows us how well we are serving our veterans.

The information provided by our new system helped us make improvements that directly affect our veterans. We have increased staffing in Pharmacy, Scheduling,



Nurse Call, and Switchboard, and are able to increase staffing when needed during peak call times.

The El Paso VA is committed to providing timely and quality access to healthcare, and will continue to look for ways to improve its service. If you need to contact our facility, the best times to call are from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and from 2:00 to 4:30 p.m. ●

El Paso VA Health Care System
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If you are a veteran who is currently smoking and would like to learn ways to stop this habit, help is available through the El Paso VA Health Care System. Please contact your primary care provider and request a consultation to the Smoking Cessation Program.

healthtrends is designed to provide general health and wellness information and news about services provided by VISN 18. **healthtrends** is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your healthcare provider.

To change your address, contact:
El Paso VA Health Care System
915-564-7876 or 1-800-672-3782 ext. 7876.
For patient concerns or issues, contact our patient representatives at 915-564-6197.

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